

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Joe Pacific

Joe Pacific was born in Rome, Italy on January 28, 1903. He immigrated to the United States in 1921, and began his own shoe repair business in 1928 in New York. When the depression came his business folded.

He relocated to Hawai'i in 1936 and, after three months, he opened another shoe repair business. When the war started, he was interned at Sand Island for three months, and his wife, who was German, was shipped to the Mainland.

He moved to California and lived there for two years. Then he returned to Hawai'i and began to build his business again. In 1959, he moved a shop to the newly built Ala Moana Center. At the height of his business, he owned shops at Holiday Mart, Kāhala Mall, Kaimukī, Waikīkī, Waimalu, Downtown, and Kailua.

He lived in Hawai'i for the rest of his life and died on October 12, 1992.

Tape Nos. 22-18-1-92 and 22-19-1-92

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Joe Pacific (JP)

March 18, 1992

Pacific Heights, O'ahu

BY: Joe Rossi (JR)

JR: This is an interview with Joe Pacific on March 18, 1992, in his Pacific Heights home. The interviewer is Joe Rossi.

Mr. Pacific, to start with, could you tell me a little bit about the family back in Italy, what your parents did when you were growing up?

JP: Oh yeah, I can tell you. My father had a leather supply house, and me and my brother just went to school. (I first came to the United States in 1916 with my parents, but we returned to Italy in 1919.) Then I came back here to the United States (alone) when I was seventeen years old, (arriving in New York on January 20, 1921). A cousin of mine from Utica, [New York] sent me the affidavit. I start to work—labor, thirty-five cents an hour. And then summertime, used to play [trombone] in a band. But I was always broke. (Chuckles) And my uncle had a shoe (repair) shop. I was staying at his house, because I had no money to live anywhere else. He says to me, "Well, why are you staying here? Why don't you come to the store. And if I got to go out, you stay there, give me a hand," which I did. Then after two months, I quit him. I asked him for a raise. He was paying me ten dollars a week, and I wanted more money. He won't give it to me, so I quit him. And I went to work for somebody else. And then I got a job at the paper mill through Father Secchi. He was very friendly with the president of the paper mill, Saint Regis Paper Company, (in Watertown, New York). And it was a pretty good job. And then I decide to leave.

I went down New York City in 1924. I was working (for Klein's Shoe Repair). I was getting along pretty nice. And then I went in business for myself (in 1928). Depression came along, and I folded just like everybody else. So then (in 1935) I went back to work for Klein on Fourteenth Street. And I saved as much as I could, but you couldn't save too much, because I was only making about twenty-seven dollars a week. Meantime, I got married (in the early thirties to a German woman named Dora Emig).

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

JP: While I was working for Klein, I had Wednesday afternoons off. And on Fourteenth Street, was a newsreel theater there. I spent twenty-five cents and I went in. And I saw about Hawai'i—people walking around barefoot, shirts sticking out. Everybody seemed to be at

ease, pleasant—palm trees. I says, “Well that’s the place for me. I’m going to go.” And sure enough, a few months later I came out.

JR: How did you do that if you didn’t have any money?

JP: Well, I had a car. I sold the car and I saved. I was saving everything. I even stopped eating sometimes to save. And I finally made it. I called New York [Grand] Central [Station] for the fare, and the man told me, “If you wait until June 1, then the railroad fare is going to be cut in half from the East Coast to the West Coast.”

So I said, “Sure, I can wait.”

And then some friends of mine in New York said, “You don’t have to worry about boat fare, because you can get a job on a boat and work your way down.” So I went. We stopped in Chicago—the train, you know. About two hours, I think, we waited. I went in a shoe store and I got a shoe box, empty shoe box. Went in a delicatessen and I got a loaf of bread and some cheese and sliced bologna. Put ’em in the shoe box, and that was my food for the train. It was three days drive those days.

I got in San Francisco and was on a Sunday night, walking around all night. Next morning I went to Embarcadero, and I see lot of men over there, you know, rowing a boat and this and that. So I asked one of the men, I says, “Hey, I got to go to Honolulu, but I got no money to pay the fare. I wonder if I can get a job to work my way over?”

He says, “Look, you seem to be a pretty nice fellow. Don’t do it. They cannot give you a job because it’s all union. And if somebody takes you aboard, promise you that they’ll get you a job, maybe they’ll go out for a little bit, but the boat goes out, they throw you overboard.” (Chuckles)

JR: Oh yeah?

JP: Yeah. So I says, “The hell with that,” (chuckles) so I backed away.

I was walking up on Market Street and right by the big department store was a little bit of a hole there, a Greyhound agency. And he said they also sold tickets, you know, steamship tickets and this and that. And there was a fellow—well, I’m a small fellow. This guy was smaller than me, with a great big hat and a big cigar. You could hardly see his face, smoking. “Hey, good morning,” he said. “Good morning, good morning.”

I says to him, “I got to get to Honolulu and I got no money.”

He says to me, “What do you want me to do, carry on my back?”

(Laughter)

JP: I’ll never forget that. So then I told him I had little over sixty dollars left from the money. (I asked him for) the cheapest ticket, and this and that. He says, “Well, the cheapest one I have is about sixty dollars. That would be steerage on the *Coolidge*. But don’t say that you’re

Italian, say that you're a Portuguese." Those tickets were only good for—those cheap tickets—for the Hindus, Portuguese, and Colored people.

I said, "I'll tell them anything as long as you get me on, you know. What the hell." But anyway, he sold me the ticket. I says to him, "Now you took all my money, I got no money to eat and to sleep for the night."

He says, "Well look, if you ain't got no money to eat and no money to sleep, you can come by my house." And he was a very nice fellow. You talk about the Jews, but the Jews got a heart. And I know, because I had a lot of experience with them.

So anyway, meantime, after I left him, I walked up to the department store and I went to the shoe repairing department downstairs. And I [told] the boss over there, the manager, I wanted a job. But I didn't tell him I was coming to Honolulu. I said I just got in from New York and this and this and this, and I need a job because I'm broke and I got no money. He says to me, "I have no job here, but I have a job for you in Oakland at the Emporium." Who the hell knew the Emporium? I never been there before. Anyway, he gives me the slip to go over there and they would hire me.

I went back to the ticket agent, and I says, "Hey, I got a job in Oakland." I showed him the [slip].

He says to me, "Make sure that Friday before two o'clock you get on the boat."

And I says, "Yeah."

I got to Oakland—those days was fifty cents, you know, the fare—and I found my way to the Emporium, went to work. And then twelve o'clock, I started to get hungry. There was another shoemaker next to me, Irish fellow. Harry was his name. I says to him, "If I ask the manager for fifty cents—I want to go to eat, and then I'll need another fifty cents for tonight to go to sleep at the Y [Young Men's Christian Association]." That's all they charged those days, fifty cents.

He says, "Oh yeah, he's all right." Well, he gave me the dollar. I went to eat. And then when it come to quit to go to sleep, Harry says to me, "What the hell you want to go sleep at the Y for? Come to sleep at my house. My wife just left me and I got the whole house"—three bedrooms and this and that.

I said, "Well, good." Then we went there, and he cooked something. We ate, we slept. Next morning we went to work. Finally, Friday morning I says to him, "Today I'm going to quit."

He said, "Why?" And I showed him the ticket. He said, "Well, if that's what you want to do." He was a nice fellow. I've been trying to get his last name and the address, and I can never get it. I wanted to send him something, you know, to repay him the kindness that he had toward me.

Well anyway, (at) twelve o'clock I quit. Told the manager before that I was going to leave. He says, "Why?"

And I told him the truth. I says, "I want to go to Honolulu." And so he gives me the pay. I got to San Francisco. I got on the boat. And when we got on the boat, came time had to bring something—you know, got to go to eat. Was a waiter there, I gave him a dollar. I says, "See, I give it to you now, but you take care of me. You understand?" And that son of a gun, he used to bring me more food—steaks, turkeys, everything, you know, fruits. And we finally got to Honolulu.

Now, I usually get up early every morning. It's a habit. It's been with me ever since I was born. The first morning I was on the ship, I was sleeping down the hold. So I go upstairs to get some fresh air, and here comes a girl, walking. A nice sweater, a nice, nice face—nice, nice. "Good morning."

"Good morning."

"How are you?" and this and that. And I started to talk to her, and she started to talk to me. She made the trip pleasant. We used to meet all the time. And after three days, I think it was—two or three days—I was walking with her like the other times. Here comes a man, who was a passenger—also steerage. And I was talking to her, (and then he begins talking to her).

After we broke up talking, I went to him. "Hey, you son of a bitch, you just met her. How you know that. . . ."

He says, "Hell, I used to see her every payday." He was a GI over here (in Hawai'i). At that time, they had the cathouses.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

(Laughter)

JP: I thought I had a college girl, and she was a prostitute.

(Laughter)

JP: Anyway, (I arrived in Hawai'i on June 17, 1936, at eight o'clock in the morning). Those days they used to have these wooden boxes for oranges. Did you ever see those crates?

JR: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. I had that thing full of fruits—apples, oranges, everything. And I coming off the boat, I was carrying that thing. I carried down all right, but going through customs this Hawaiian guy took it away from me. He said, "You cannot bring it in, it's not inspected." Well, what can I do? Don't want to fight, so I give it to him. And that was all right.

Got to town, right away I looked for job. I went to gas stations, anything, as long as I get a job. There was a gas station by the old police station, and I asked the owner if I could get a job over there. He said, "Well, I have no job for you, but I think I can—I'll take you over there myself. I think you can get a job over there." Sure enough, put me in his car and took me to The Islands Welding [& Supply Company]. You know, by where the tax office is

today?

JR: Mm hmm [yes].

JP: That's where The Islands Welding used to be. But before was all dirt roads and everything. I got the job, and next morning I went to work. So Wednesday morning I got here and Thursday morning I went to work. And this Russian Jew, I was his helper. They treated me nice. That's why I'm always nice with people, because everybody treated me nice. I don't know why. I don't know why.

Then, after I get through working, I look around town. Always watching the shoe shops, you know, what they do. The prices were so high. In New York, we used to get nine, ten cents to fix a lady's shoe. To (repair) heels, nine, ten cents. That's what you could get. And over here they were getting fifty cents. Man's rubber heel, seventy-five cents. In New York, hey, twenty-five cents, twenty-six cents. And half the time, you have to fight to get that.

But I had no money to start, so I went to the banks. Bank of Hawai'i—Mr. [Percy] Deverill, he was nice. He greeted me just like a gentleman. And I ask him, I says, "I just come in from New York. I had business over there, but that depression knocked me out. So now if I could get started over here, I could make some money."

"You got securities?"

I said, "No, I ain't got no securities."

"Well, then we cannot loan you money. You know, it's not my money. It's the regulation. You got to have security. You got somebody to sign for you?"

I said, "No, I don't know anybody."

"Well, we cannot."

Then I went to the Bishop [National] Bank, which they call now the First [Hawaiian] Bank. Before, it was Bishop. And same thing, "You got to have security." He died not long ago, the senior vice-president, Mr. Desmond Stanley. Then after I got in business and I started to make some money—when you make some money, everybody wants to know you. You understand? His wife used to bake me shortbread couple times a year. We got to be good friends. But he could not loan me money, the same way.

On Saturdays, I did not work. I mean, The Islands Welding didn't work on Saturday. I used to take my daughter to town. We were living on Vineyard Street. We had two rooms over there. I used to walk out. I used to be with the kid. You know, she was just small. And it was something about that Chinese market there, I used to enjoy watching those guys. They would just swing things around and talk Chinese. To me, it was an entertainment. Anyway, went by Smith Street and King Street. It was National Mortgage [and Finance Company], and they said that they loan money—real estate and this and the other, and then on the bottom line was "We also make personal loans." Well, that's the place for me. I tried the others, I'll try here too. They're not going to hit me. All they can say is no.

I go in, and the girl showed me the big boss, Mr. [Masayuki] Tokioka. I talked to him and told him, "If I had capital to get started, I could make money in no time." And he listened and listened and listened. And then I told him about this shoemaker opposite the Hawai'i Theatre on Bethel Street that was going to go back to Madeira, [Portugal] and he wanted to sell out. I says, "If I could get some money to buy him out [i.e., his supplies and equipment], I get a good buy. And in no time, I pay you back."

He says to me, "What do you got for security?"

I showed him my hands. I says, "These are my security, and I pay you back sooner than you want me to pay you back."

So he calls Mr. [Clifton] Yamamoto—he's dead now, but the girl is still alive. Mr. Yamamoto was a happy man. And Tokioka told him that my security was my hands, and they both laughed and start laughing like hell. And then Mr. Tokioka put his hand on top of my shoulder, "We'll take a chance," and loans me \$500.

Right away, I go to the shoemaker over there. I says, "I got the money. Give me the key."
(Laughs)

JR: Where was that store?

JP: On Bethel, across the way from the Hawai'i Theatre. But it's no longer there now. I'm talking about fifty-five years ago, when (Honolulu) was Honolulu. But now, there's no more Honolulu. Now it's Miami.

(Laughter)

JP: Anyway, so we closed the deal. And then I had to have a store to put the stuff in. There was an empty place on Beretania Street right near Fort [Street]. And I inquired, and they told me who the landlord was. Ernest Gonsalves was managing the place for his father-in-law. "But he'll be here every day. He'll be upstairs in his office every day around eleven o'clock."

So I went to see him. And when I ask him about the store, it was fifty dollars a month, the rent. He says, "Well, I don't want to give you the store, because everybody who's been in the store is the jinx. They stay a little bit, then they got to get because no business."

Me and my big mouth, I says to him, "Look, you give me that store, in three months time there'll be crowds over here." And sure enough.

[Mr. Soper] was in the real estate business with Mr. Gonsalves. You know, they were friends. And they both used to bring sandwiches from home, and they go to eat upstairs around eleven o'clock every morning. And he was there. He told Ernest, "Why don't you give him the store? Young man, he knows what he's talking. Take a chance."

Well, (with) Mr. Soper talking to (Gonsalves), he gives me the store. He had a pocket watch. He looks at the watch. "Well, it's about eleven o'clock. I'll only charge you for half a day." The son of a bitch, he charged for me for half a day. I give him the money.

And then I had to work out to bring all the machines and everything into the store, which I did. I had friends from The Islands Welding help me and all of that. On the seventeenth of August 1936, I opened up the shoe shop. It was on a Saturday, and I made seventy-five bucks that day. Those days, (I would start at) five o'clock in the morning, (and) I'd be working till ten, twelve o'clock at night. The more I work, I see money, the better I felt, you know. Sure enough, when I thought I had everything going nice. . . .

At that time, I had a house in Kaimukī between Ninth and Tenth Avenue, which we had rented just a couple of months since I got started. So the agent from Pioneer [Savings and Loan Association] stopped by the store and told me, "Joe, you buy the place or you got to get out, because we want to sell. We want to get our money out. We're not in the rental business." Well, the damn house was just like a stable—single-board construction. You could see (through the walls)—you need no lights—because of the cheap build.

I said, "I'll let you know." Meantime, I got to be friends with John Pavao. He used to live across the street. And I told him what happened. "Now I got things going good, now I got to look for a house because they told me I got to get out. Find me a small place so I can build a little house."

He says, "Well, across the street from me is Harry Spellman." He used to be a big boss with Libby, [McNeill & Libby], the cannery, and he had the lot, first lot over there [on Pacific Heights Road]. He says, "I'll call him up, and he'll come down and talk to you."

He did, he came down. He want \$1,000 for the lot. I says, "I ain't got \$1,000. I got \$900."

"All right, give it to me." And I got the lot. Then I bought a contractor. He built the garage. It was a frame building by the road. We moved into that garage while they were building the house. Started in July, and (by) Thanksgiving the house was finished. We had Thanksgiving dinner (in the new house).

JR: What year was that?

JP: Thirty-seven. Everything was coming along. I was making money. It was hard work, but I didn't mind because I enjoyed it. When you're young and you got some ambition, the more you work the better you feel. So then, I owed some money for the house—American Security Bank. They used to be on King and [Nu'uānu Avenue]. Every Monday morning I used to go there to make a deposit, and I used to pay so much for the house. One morning, I says to the clerk that was taking care of me at the bank, "How much I owe you there?" It was about \$5,000.

JR: What was the total?

JP: Well, the total, because we bought furniture and I had to pay back National Mortgage, it was around \$8,000. And I had over 5,000 in the bank. What the hell was his name now? I can't remember his name. I say, "How much more I owe you?" So much. I says, "All right, I'll pay you off. Just give me my money, I'll pay it off."

"Oh no, don't pay it off, because it's a" And I paid off the house.

Then the war came along, and it took me and it took my (German) ex-wife. And I was (put) in Sand Island [Detention Center], but they shipped her back to Texas. They were going to exchange her on that Scandanavian ship. You know, they used to exchange prisoners. From South America, they used to bring up lot of Germans and bring them back to Germany. Well anyway, then I got these people, like Delegate King, Sam [Wilder] King. You know Judge Sam [Pailthorp] King? Well, his father was a delegate to Congress. And I got Judge [Willson] Moore, I got the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], I got friends on the Mainland that I used to do business, you know, buy leather from. Well anyway, we stopped them from shipping her back to Germany. But she couldn't come back to Honolulu. (She could only go as far as the West Coast.)

So then me and my daughter was left at the house. Because after about three-and-a-half months, they put me out from Sand Island. I used to send the ex-wife \$1,000 a month. She was staying with Mr. Kingston in San Mateo, [California]. He signed for her, you know. And the government trust---well, his brother was in charge of the OPA [Office of Price Administration] in San Francisco. I mean, big wheels. Another brother was in charge of the stock exchange. Anyway, me and my daughter got left over here. She used to go to sleep nights with her mother's picture, you know. "What the hell," I says. "I got the money." I had some money. "What do I want to stay here for? I'll go to the Mainland, too."

I went up there and bought a home in San Mateo. I didn't like it, was windy and the weather was terrible. Anyway, talking with neighbors—"Oh, if you go down south, around Los Angeles way, the weather there is just like Hawai'i, same as Hawai'i."

I had a Chrysler car that I bought, which (through personal contacts) I got the navy priority to buy. Was on a Wednesday afternoon, I got in the car and I went to Los Angeles. And when I got to Los Angeles, I looked for a house. But (having) never been there before, I didn't know much. I tried to get a place to sleep that night. All the hotels (were) full. I went (to a) garage (and asked) if I could leave the car there. "Yeah, sure you can."

"Can I sleep in it, 'cause I can't get a room?"

"Sure, you can sleep in it." So I slept in the car.

Next morning, I woke up, washed my face, got everything, and then I gave an extra dollar to the attendant over there. I says to him, "Hey, I don't want you to think that I'm a bum." I pull out the money. I had \$16,000 in my pocket. Boy, when he saw all that money, I thought he was going to pop.

(Laughter)

JP: Then I called Tom Trento. His wife is here. Tom died a few years ago. As a matter of fact, the first bench on Kalākaua Avenue, by Kūhiō Beach, you see his name, Tom Trento. His family built the bench over there. His wife is here. We were together about two weeks ago. So Tom, he was a barber at the Roosevelt Hotel on Hollywood Boulevard. For two weeks---he had a car and we went all over looking for a place. I found a nice place in Orange County. A beautiful place, but the damn flies. And then some of the neighbors---you know, people talk when they see you interested in something or other, and they come to find out

what. They told me, they says, "You take that place, but everyday it stinks like anything in the afternoon." Because they were making fertilizer (nearby).

I said, "Oh well, that's not for me." So I started to look up in the valley. And when I was almost ready to give up, we found this place. Belonged to a man (who) was making soaps, perfumes, and he was mixed up with the movies, you know. Beautiful place. Had thirty-six trees, apricot trees, and had all kinds of other fruits. Well, I liked the place, so I made the appointment with the owner, signed the papers, give him his money, and I went back San Mateo to get the family. The home I had over there—I called the real estate man, "Sell it, and when you sell it, send me the money." He did.

When I got to Southern California, I had a light suit. Something like this, but good material, not cheap junk like this. It was beautiful—hot, nice, sunny. After I bought the place, I went back to San Mateo, got the family, and drove down. Was the fourth of December. Never forget it. It was raining, raining by the buckets, you know. I said, "What the hell is this?"

After a while, (I) started to fix the place up. Neighbors, people go by, "Who's this people, spend a lot of money here?"

I says, "I don't know them, I'm the yard man here."

(Laughter)

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JP: Well, I got the place in '43, in December '43. And I start to fix the place up in '44, '45. But then, we used to argue—the wife—all the time, all the time. Everything had to be her ways. If a friend of mine, Italian, came in the house, she wouldn't even offer him a glass of water. If a German came over, (she gave) him the whole house. You know, that made me. . . . You see that today, tomorrow, next time, it just goes against your grain. Finally, if a woman came over, if you talk to this lady, then she can tell you. When I was young, a lot of woman used to make a lot of fuss with me. She used to—"Oh, you go to bed." She accused me with every woman. If I say good morning to a woman, right away, "You go to bed with her."

Anyway, finally I did go to bed. I moved out of the house, and I moved with a show girl in Laurel Canyon. She just got divorced from her husband. She got a good settlement. She got a home and so much a month. And every night, all those night spots on the Sunset Strip. Want to see me, that's where you find me, between eight and nine, for six months. And then I says, "Hey, this can't go on forever. I better get the hell out of here." And she want to come to Honolulu with me. If the people saw me walking down the street with her. . . . She had two dogs, want to take the dogs with her. I tell her, I say, "Those mutts? Hell, over there we'd kill 'em." And then we got in an argument. And that's what I was looking, to get in an argument, so I could walk out on her. And I did. Well anyway, then I came back here and I got started again.

JR: What were you doing when you were living in Southern California? What were you doing to make money when you were living in Southern California?

JP: I had the business going over here. When I left here, I didn't sell the business. I sold two shares, but I remained the third. And I used to get more than they did. And they used to send me money every week. Every week, they send me a report and the check. [The two partners eventually bought JP's interest in the store in 1945 for \$12,000.] I came back (to Hawai'i on October 5, 1945). And the minute I opened up (a shoe repair shop of my own on the corner of Bishop and Union streets), all the people come to me and nobody went to them [i.e., the former partners], so they closed it.

I used to do work for the crippled people. You know, Shriners and doctors who had people who had trouble with their feet, I used to take care of them. (Due to shortages of materials after the war, you couldn't build. I got Dr. Alsup and others to write letters to the government on my behalf, saying that I needed to open a store to repair shoes for their patients.) So anyway, got everything going all right.

(In November 1945, I met Christine Mondelli through a mutual friend. She was a WAVE [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] at the time. We were married in 1947.)

And then I [opened a store in] Ala Moana. That's where I made the money, Ala Moana Center.

JR: That was in '59 that it opened?

JP: Yeah. I was one of the original, you know. About three, four years before '59, they asked me, "If we open up the shopping center, would you come in?"

I say, "Sure I'll come in."

Because I was going to open up (another) small place where the police station is now. That used to be Sears, [Roebuck, and Company]. And the manager of Sears was Mr. [Morley] Theaker, and he was very nice with me all the time. He was going to give me space over there. But then he told me, "Now we're dealing with Dillingham about a shopping center. It's no use you moving in here and then you got to move out."

And that's what happened. So I didn't go to Sears. And Dillingham asked me if I would go in, and I said, "Sure, I'll go in." We never signed no papers, no deposit, no nothing, just the word. And they gave me---first I asked for a small store. But after I was there couple of months, I could see what was going to happen. And there was only one store left, a big one. I said, "I want that place."

And my wife, "You lost your shirt in Waikīkī." I had a place in Waikīkī, I caught the guy stealing and everything. "Now, a big place here and you going to go broke, just like you did in Waikīkī." Instead of that, after we got started over there then she saw how wrong she was.

And everything was going fine. Then came the time to renew my lease at [Ala Moana]

Center. There was an agent then, a big boss. She says, "No, we cannot give you a new lease on that place. That place is too big for you." Because I had the back room. I had a lot of supplies. I used to buy a lot of stuff, that's why I made the money. Well anyway, I got Hyman Greenstein, the lawyer, to sue 'em for \$10 million. And at that time, they were dealing with Daiei and the insurance people. They couldn't go ahead on the account of lawsuit. So then she came around, and she says, "Yeah, we'll give you a lease."

"Yeah, and you put on the lease that I can sell out anytime I want to." And they did. They gave me everything just so I would drop the lawsuit. I had to give Hyman \$10,000 for it, son of a gun. But I got what I wanted.

And then this friend of mine in Dayton, Ohio—he had shops all over the Mainland—he says, "Anytime you want to sell out, give me a call and I'll come right down. I want to buy this place for my son." So I called him, one week later he was here—him, his wife, his son, his lawyer, his accountant, everybody. And we did the business. I got my money, they got the shop. And then they (lost) the shop. He died, you know. The man that we did business with, he died. So his son was in charge—over-grown kid. Big fellow, all he thinks about is eat and sleep, and leaves everything to the bookkeeper. And they had a manager, a woman, and she had a husband. Hell, they stole everything. (That) finally put them out of business.

JR: How many stores did you have at the end?

JP: How many stores they had?

JR: How many did you have?

JP: Well, I had five. But I had already sold four.

JR: Oh, so it was just the Ala Moana.

JP: Just the Ala Moana. I had the Holiday Mart (until 1980), Kāhala Mall (until 1975), and. . . I even forgot. Oh, Kaimukī, by the (Queen) Theatre, and which other one? Ala Moana, Kāhala Mall, Holiday Mart, which other one? What the hell was it? Well, I got the list here. I completely forgot, and I want to forget 'em. Because when I remember. . . It's no good to be out of business. You know, you should be doing something. But things turn out this way. [At one time or another, JP also had shops in Waikīkī, Waimalu, Downtown, and Kailua.]

JR: What year did you finally sell the last store?

JP: I think (that) was in '83.

(In) Kāhala Mall, I had a man working, and a woman was the cashier. Everytime I call, "I want to talk to the man in charge."

"Oh, he just went downstairs." They had a bathroom downstairs. I called again. "Oh, he just went downstairs to wash his hands." So one day I drove up. I went next door—was a shoe store—and I called. "Oh, he just went downstairs." But I was over there, I was watching. He was already going home. He was supposed to work until five o'clock. Instead of that, three

o'clock he'd take off every day.

Anyway, at Holiday Mart, was a Colored guy working in there—he's dead, too—and he used to steal. Down in Waikīkī, an Italian fellow, the son of a bitch was worse than anyone. Steal, but they wind up with nothing. All these people that take—they steal, they do this, they do things wrong—they don't gain nothing. They wind up broke. So anyway, I'm glad in a way that I'm out of it. Because if you have a business, it's not the business that makes it hard for you, it's the men working for you. They're the ones. It's very hard to find an honest man, very hard. The damn money end up driving 'em crazy. Well, that's it.

JR: Can I ask you some . . .

JP: Yeah.

JR: . . . more specific questions? First of all, what part of Italy were you born in and what was the birthdate?

JP: The birthdate was January 28, 1903. And I was born in a small town below Rome (known as Morolo). But my papers all say Rome.

JR: What was the family name?

JP: Pacifici. P-A-C-I-F-I-C-I. That's it. And then they made it Pacific because it's easier to pronounce.

JR: Who is it that made it Pacific?

JP: When I got my citizen(ship) paper.

JR: You didn't mind?

JP: No.

JR: Why did the family come to America . . .

JP: Why?

JR: . . . from Italy?

JP: Well, because everybody tried to make something, you know. But then lot of them get disappointed. My father, my mother, they didn't like it at all. After three years, they went back (to Italy). Just made enough money to pay the fare to go back. Because, you see, for us, we get used to work every day, and you make (an) effort to better yourself and all that. But the old-timers, they don't want. They miss the lazy life that they have over there. And they miss their friends, they miss their families and everything. But when you leave when you're young like I did, you know, (it's) a different story. And my mother used to say, "I got a tongue that long, and over here I can hardly use it."

(Laughter)

JP: Because she couldn't talk English, you know.

JR: Are you the only one in the family that stayed [i.e., returned to the U.S.]?

JP: Yeah, yeah. I'm the only bum. (Laughs) That's what they said.

JR: Back home?

JP: Yeah. Now, my mother was crazy about me. When I went back the first time after the war, I took the *Queen Elizabeth* to England and then, with a small boat, went to Cherbourg, France. From there, we took the train and went to Paris. I spent three days in Paris, and then I took the plane to Rome. When we got in Rome—I [had] sent them a wire that I was going to arrive such and such a time—well, my mother, my brothers, everybody was at the airport. And when I was going down—they had the stairway those days, and they had guards to hold the people back. (Laughs) My mother, she was just like a ball player. She pushed those guys when she saw me coming down, and she ran upstairs. She was crazy about me. That's why I did my duty. I used to send her money all the time, take care of her. She went hungry to feed us. That's what you call a mother.

My father wasn't much of anything. He thought about friends more than anything else. He would go to the *osteria* and drink wine and this and that. He didn't care about the family. He was drinking every day. That's why he didn't amount to a hill of beans. That's why me and my brothers, we don't drink. I got wine piled up here inside. I never drink—beer, wine, whiskey, nothing—because we saw what my father did.

JR: How many children were in the family?

JP: Seven. Four boys, three girls. Now it's only three of us left. Me, my younger brother, and my younger sister. I just got a letter from them the other day. They're waiting, everybody's waiting.

JR: For you?

JP: Yeah. I'd like to go, but I'm afraid to go. It's too far. I'm afraid I might croak on the way.

JR: You wouldn't want to take a boat?

JP: No. I rode in boats. When I was seventeen and I came (back to the U.S. by myself, I) took a boat from Antwerp in Belgium. I spent two weeks over there. It took eighteen days and nineteen nights. When I got to New York, I was green, you know, from the mildew.

JR: You know, you mentioned that when you came to Hawai'i you rode steerage.

JP: Yeah.

JR: And that was reserved for—what did you say, Portuguese, Blacks . . .

JP: Hindus, Chinese. No Whites was allowed.

JR: What was the accomodation like?

JP: Well, it was double cot. You know, frame with a canvas, then with a mattress on top, a cheap mattress. And there was another one on top of that. It was all right. Hell, when you got to do something, you do it no matter what.

JR: Can you remember the first time you saw the islands from the boat?

JP: Oh yeah. That's the first thing you do, you watch—Diamond Head.

JR: Was it what you expected? Was it what you expected the islands to look like?

JP: Well, yes and no. There are lots of times you say, "So far away, I wonder what's going to be?" You kind of think about, especially not knowing anybody. Well, that's life. You got to take chances.

JR: You didn't know anybody in Hawai'i.

JP: No. Now everybody knows me, and that's no good.

JR: (Laughs) What did you bring with you? Did you have any clothes with. . . . Did you have luggage, did you have anything like that?

JP: Oh yeah, I had a couple. Not much expensive stuff, you know, just enough to get by. I never cared much. Hell, I got suits in here that have been hanging on my closet for how many years, and I never even put 'em on once. Andy Mohan, you know, down [Amfac] Building, Andy Mohan was his name. He's expensive, but he does a nice job.

JR: When you first came here, how did Hawai'i seem different from the Mainland?

JP: Well, I mean, when you leave New York, everybody rush, rush, rush, rush. You come down here, everybody slow, slow, slow. So it's quite a bit of difference, you know. But you going to like it, because that rush. . . . You got on that damn subway—boy, that used to kill me every morning. A lot of these people, they use a lot of that damn garlic, and the smell used to kill me. I come over here and (chuckles) none of that. You never lived in New York?

JR: Family lived there. I just would visit occasionally.

JP: Yeah. Well, you ride the subway in the morning, when the people go to work. You got to fight your way in, and you got to fight your way out. Now it's worse.

About ten, fifteen years ago, the manager of the [Hilton] Hawaiian Village—I cannot think of his name. We were very good friends, and he was a big shot with the Hilton. So when I told him I was going to New York, he says, "Well, then you go stay at the Waldorf Astoria." Well, you know what the Waldorf Astoria is. General [Douglas] MacArthur was having breakfast with us one day. And I had my family with me. They gave us corner rooms and

everything. Fifty dollars a day. Would cost about maybe [\$]500 or maybe \$1,000 a day. And when I left, we took a boat to Italy that time—was a new boat, was maiden voyage—the management even gave me a briefcase, going-away present, you know, on account of him.

JR: Yeah, your friend.

JP: That's why I said everybody has been good to me.

JR: When you came to Hawai'i, you were already married, right, and you already had . . .

JP: Yeah, the German wife.

JR: When did they come over?

JP: I sent them ahead of time. I sent them ahead of time, and they were staying here for a few days, and then I come over. Because I had to stay behind until I got things straightened out. Because we had an apartment in New York—cheap place, you know—and I told my uncle in Brooklyn, "You go over there and take everything."

And he writes to me, "You know, you have a lot of friends (here), why don't you tell them to bring it to me?" He want me, from Hawai'i, to arrange to bring him the. . . . Yeah.

JR: What did you call your store when you first opened here?

JP: The first one was Quick Service [Shoe Repair Shop], 107 South Beretania. And then I start to use my name, Joe Pacific. It was suggested by Mr. Kingston of Kingston Leather Company in San Francisco. He said, "Put your name on it so everybody knows your name." And sure enough. I don't know if I have that. . . . (JP looks for something on his desk.)

JR: This is a postcard . . .

JP: That was the Ala Moana.

JR: . . . of the Ala Moana store. It's a big store.

JP: Oh yeah.

JR: So at this time, it says, you had the Ala Moana Shopping Center and you also had a store 1142 Union Street [and] Queen Theatre building on Wai'ala'e Avenue. "Most up-to-date shoe repair shops in Hawai'i."

JP: Oh yeah, yeah. They never saw anything like it. They never saw anything like it.

JR: I wanted to ask you some questions about exactly what happened on December 7, that morning. Where were you? What do you remember happening that day?

JP: Well, I had three fellows—they were GIs, you know. When they found out I was Italian, they started coming (into) the store, we get to be friends. And then Mr. Kingston had pigeons in

San Francisco, and he sent me a pair. Then we had a small cage made, but then those things double up so much, I had to make a bigger cage. So I told the Champ—we called him the Champ. Briguglio [was his name]. His son teaches at the 'Iolani School. And then another two GIs—one of them retired from the post office in Van Nuys, and the other one lives in Long Island. And they were staying here. They came down Saturday, and Saturday night in the little place here—I had couple of cots in there—they slept over there. And one of them slept in the house on the porch. And next morning, we were having breakfast in the house before we went to fix the cage. We heard all these bombs, so I says to the Champ—he was a sergeant in Schofield [Barracks]—“Hey, those things sound like the McCoys.”

He said, “Oh, they having maneuvers and they using live ammunition.”

Well anyway, this sounded funny to me. I went up on the road and here comes an old Plymouth with an old man inside coming up the hill. When he saw me there, he pulled along side of me, “Hey Joe, we’re under enemy attack.” So right away I went downstairs. I came down and I told those guys what happened, what the old man said.

And we had a radio, so put the radio on. And the announcer says if there’s any defense workers or military to report. So right away those GIs, they start to [get] ready for me to take ’em Downtown to catch the bus and go back to Schofield. And then says, “If there’s any military, tell ’em, wake ’em up.” And I had a marine lieutenant living in the small house.

JR: Down below.

JP: Yeah. [Harold] Bench was his name. So I went and knock on the door and his wife—I says, “Hey, tell Harold to go to fight a war, to get up and go.” And then they put the radio on and they hear, so right away he jumped in the car. I took these guys Downtown to the old YMCA and they caught the bus, went up. And at that time, the Japanese were flying over. I stayed home. Then, I was a volunteer fireman because my old shop was across the street from the fire station, so they called me, and I went down. And they told me to take somebody to the end of the island. I had an Oldsmobile, a new car. They put on the windshield, “Police.” And I went by Pearl Harbor. And that was when the heat was really on. See those ships tipping and burning. It stays in your mind. You never forget it, you know. So I took these guys up Kahuku. Then I couldn’t come back Pearl Harbor side, I had to go around the island.

JR: Why couldn’t you come back that way?

JP: They won’t let you. Yeah, the police said you got to go around. So every few miles, some GI would stop me with a rifle pointing at me. And then they see who I was, and they let me go. I finally got home, and stayed home. I couldn’t go no place anyway. The next day, I didn’t go to the—the stores were closed. My daughter and I went and got some paper, black paper, to black out the window in the kitchen. And while her and I were doing that, that’s when the man from the FBI came over and picked me up. (It was two o’clock in the afternoon.)

I told him, I says, “Me and my kid didn’t eat nothing. Wait till we have a sandwich.”

“No.” He says, “You come down, they will only check your papers, and you come right back. In fifteen minutes, you’ll be home.”

So I says, "Well, what the hell. I ain't going to die for fifteen minutes." Instead, it took me almost four months.

JR: Why did they say they wanted to check your papers?

JP: Well, that's the excuse that they had to take you in at the Immigration Station. He parked the car up there on the road, and as I was going in the car, was a lady in the back, Mrs. Todd. Her husband was a big shot with the Bishop [National] Bank. We used to talk Italian sometime. She came here when she was about two years old, and they picked her up too. Can you imagine? So then I went down to Immigration Station.

JR: Where was your daughter? You had to leave your daughter?

JP: Yeah, I left the kid there. Then when I got down to Immigration Station, they had a list. And I thought they check, then I go. Instead of that, "Go upstairs." That's where they had the bunks. Anyway, while that was taking place, they (returned at seven o'clock that evening to get) my ex-wife, and they left my daughter alone (in the house).

Well, the women start to scream when they took them down the station. Well, what good does it do you? That didn't do you any good. The only thing to do. . . . That's their game, so you play their game. If they want to take you in, they take you in. You say no, they shoot you. They take you dead instead of alive. That's okay.

JR: What kind of people did it seem that were there with you? Were they all European?

JP: Oh, they had Japanese mostly. The majority was Japanese—Germans, other Italians. After I was in about two weeks, Major Walker, which I knew—he used to sell appliances, Major Walker. I had bought a refrigerator from him for the little house, and we knew each other. So he came over and told me, "Joe, don't tell anybody, otherwise I get in trouble. You going to be released, but we cannot let you go out until the paper comes in from Washington." Well, when the paper came from Washington, the military governor—that is, his staff—from 'Iolani Palace, they were moving (in)to a frame building that they just built. They used to call it the White House. During that transaction, they claim—that's what they tell me—that they lost my papers. But after a while, they finally found them. And I was the first one that they put out.

Then was a Major Bruhn from intelligence asking me lot of foolish questions. Well, I told him, I says, "Listen, if I had any use for the government in Italy, I would have gone back. But you see, I'm here. I built a home here. Every penny I have is stuck."

He says, "Well, we had to take you in, because your brother-in-law wrote to the German consul in San Francisco and told him that he was a naturalized German, if he could join the German army." That was during the time that [Adolf] Hitler was swallowing up one country after another, and he wanted to join the German army. "And your wife"—they tapped the phone, and she was talking with other German people here before the war. And she used to praise Hitler all the time.

And I used to tell the woman, I says, "Shut your mouth, because these people, (if) they find out that you like this, we going to have trouble."

"Ah, Italians!" Italians dumb and then they [i.e., Germans] smart.

"And that's why we had to take you in, because (your) brother-in-law was a German, German army, [and] your wife talking like this. We figure maybe you was the same way."

JR: Can I get you just to stop for one second? I got to stop the . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 22-19-1-92; SIDE ONE

JR: So they were tapping your phone?

JP: Yeah, yeah. And they were opening up the letters, too, way before, years before, when England—you know, [Winston] Churchill was telling [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt what to do. They were checking all the mail sent through the mail. And they had the phone.

JR: Did you have any idea at the time?

JP: No. I mind my business. I don't think about those things. I didn't think about it. You do what's right, and you got nothing to fear. But one Sunday, was a reporter for the [*Honolulu Star-Bulletin*—I cannot think of his name now—and they were here. They used to come down, was friendly with my ex-brother-in-law. And they used to talk so much about Hitler, this and that. I told the two of them, "Hey, you want to talk politics, get the hell out of here, go some other place. I don't want to hear that stuff here." Well, what do I want to listen to that baloney for? "You want to praise Hitler, go praise him some other place and not my place." But that's how they were. They were so—because they thought for sure that Germany was beating everybody. They was beating everybody at that time. The United States was not in yet. But the United States ain't going to let England go down. Don't forget that. Because the old story, blood is thicker than water.

JR: Do you think that they had legitimate reasons for locking up your wife at the time?

JP: Well, in a way, if it's the way they told me. See, I only go by what they told me. They had a reason. They had a reason. Because if you praise somebody, in other words, it means that you like that party. And what she did was, with these German people that were here—and there was a German woman that came to Honolulu to raise money [for Germany], and she was mixed up with that woman. And was this man that [owned] a bar in Waikīkī on Kalākaua Avenue. Forgot his name. That's where all the—that's where the nest was. Those Germans, that's how they are. When I'd been asking my ex-wife, "Why don't you try to get yourself a (U.S.) citizen paper?"

"Me, I'm a good German. I'm a good German." Don't want to change. That's how they are.

JR: Did you ever hear of the name Otto Kuehn?

JP: Yeah. They claimed that he was a spy. That's what they claim, but I don't believe it.

JR: Did you know him?

JP: Well, in the camp, you know.

JR: He was in the camp, too?

JP: Oh yeah, then he was shipped out. And one of his sons and his wife. Why, you didn't see . . .

JR: No, I came across his name when I was reading up on the war. [Kuehn was the one person convicted of espionage committed in Hawai'i.]

JP: Yeah.

JR: And I knew that he was interned. I didn't know that he was in the same group though.

JP: Well, he was for a while, and then they shipped him out. Because he was supposed to be special, a special spy.

JR: Do you think there were any spies here?

JP: No, there wasn't. Maybe some Japanese from the consul, but the other people, how the hell you going to spy, go against the country that gave you something? If the old country gave you something, you wouldn't be here. I mean, that's what I told the damn fool, that Major Bruhn. I says, "If I had something to make over there, I wouldn't be here. But that's why I come over here, to better myself. And I'm bettering myself. I'm making money, and you know it. And you think I'm going to be foolish?" I say, "Sure my family's over there. What the hell am I going to do?"

Where you going to find another place like this? I don't mean Hawai'i, I mean the United States in general. You're free to do what you want to do. You go to other countries, they hold you down. Like my brother, the one ahead of me, Henry. That was a good boy. He used to work nighttime, study, and he made himself something. He was the under secretary for the propaganda for [Benito] Mussolini. You understand? And then he got to be, after the war—Mussolini lost—the chief of police in Rome. Oh, he was a good man. And even if he had to go in the toilet, he take the briefcase with him. We used to make fun of him. But anyway, when he used to write to me, on the envelope [he would print] "under secretary for the propaganda" and this and that. Well, the FBI, right away, boom, they open it.

But Mr. [Robert] Shivers, the head of the FBI here, I was supposed to be in his house that Sunday when the Jap(anese) come over here (and bombed Pearl Harbor).

JR: Oh yeah?

JP: Yeah. Because my sister was in Africa with her husband, and he was interested so much about the Africa business and my brother, this and that. But he [i.e., Henry] never mentioned

no government stuff, just the family, you know.

JR: In the letters.

JP: Yeah, oh yeah. And that's why they never. . . . Yeah, and now Henry's dead. He left three boys and three girls. I wish the hell someday you go to Rome and you go to see them. The three boys, one of 'em is in the Vatican, two with the banks. One of 'em is a manager of a bank, and another one of 'em is in charge of all the bookkeeping and all. He's the big boss over there, but so nice. And then the three girls that marry these fellows, I don't know where the hell they find nice fellows like that. They're nice to everybody. They're crazy about me, all of them. You know why? I never give nobody trouble. And if I can say something nice about somebody, I say it. Otherwise, I say nothing.

Like every once in a while I'll send them something, you know, make packages and things. But I've been doing that all my life. It's a family and they don't need it, but you feel better when you send them something. Now they're all waiting. Now Sunday, Theresa has a husband—that's one of the girls—and he says, "If you don't come, I'll come and get you." (Chuckles) And he's a big fellow, you know. He was in the army, and he was taken prisoner in Albania. They got two apartments in Rome. One they rent out, and one they live in. And then they built this beautiful little place below Rome. You ought to see the place. Like my sister, I just got a letter the other day. They're all waiting. So we play cards, you know, by the lake. They got a home by the lake. But you can't go by the lake now, it's so cold. It's way up high. But summertime, boy, it's beautiful there.

JR: What happened to your daughter when you and your wife were both interned?

JP: She was in the house for a few days by herself. Then when the man in charge the store saw the (tape inaudible) go down, they didn't know what happened to me. So he came up here, and then my daughter told him that the men came over and took me. Then he took her to his house. But we didn't like his house. When I found out, we started screaming blue murder. And so we finally got in touch with Judge [Willson] Moore, and he made arrangements for the convent, the school in Kaimukī—what's the name of that school?

JR: Sacred Hearts?

JP: Sacred Hearts Academy, yeah. And she went there.

JR: How did you find this out, if you were locked up there at Sand Island?

JP: Yeah, no newspaper, no nothing. But there's always people that. . . .

JR: Get word to you somehow.

JP: The fire chief [William Blaisdell] came over and brought me a shirt. Duke Kahanamoku came over there to see me. Mayor [Lester] Petrie—he was the mayor then—he came to see me. I told you, they're nice people.

JR: How did you meet all these people?

JP: In the store.

JR: In the store. They were customers?

JP: Yeah.

JR: Yeah.

JP: And then the fire chief, I used to sleep in the station sometimes. I was too tired to go home, I go to sleep upstairs. Assistant Fire Chief [Edward] Boyle, I used to have his room. (Chuckles) Oh, they were all nice.

JR: What was it like having to stay there for those months?

JP: Nothing, you couldn't do nothing. Captain Eifler, he was a mean son of a bitch. And I knew him. He used to be checking things. When the people come on the boat, he used to check 'em. (He was an immigration officer before being put in charge of Sand Island Detention Center.)

He asked me—he never called me by the name Joe, always Pacific—"Hey Pacific, you want to do this?"

I says, "Yeah, I don't mind." He put me in charge of the kitchen. And I had all these Japanese—just like monks, they scrub everything, clean everything. Anyway, they built a frame to put a screen, and we used to hang the meat. And I had an assistant by the name of Carl Kuperez. He died about seven, eight months ago. I used to tell him, "Hey, make sure that everything is spotless."

Because on Sunday morning, Captain Eifler and Lieutenant Spillen, they used to put (on) their monkey suits, you know, the white suits, and then go inspect everything. We used to make fun of them. So he opened the screen door, and he saw one fly. "Pacific, you see it?"

I says, "Hey, I see it. Give me some fly paper and I'll hang 'em up by the door, so if they come in . . ."

"Yeah, but that's the easy way. I want things done the hard way."

"Well, then you do it yourself." And I quit. (Laughs)

JR: You could quit?

JP: Oh sure, what the hell. I never got paid. They paid everybody else, but they never paid me.

JR: They paid other people?

JP: Yeah, eighty cents a day.

JR: Oh yeah? I didn't know. . . .

JP: I have to tell [Senator Daniel] Inouye, I have to tell him, "You got everything for the (Japanese) [i.e., reparations], now get something for the Italians." (Chuckles)

Anyway, so then few days went by and I was just sitting around in the sun and this and that, play cards. He says to me, "Pacific, I'm having a lot of trouble in the laundry. Would you do this for me?"

I says, "What the hell, sure." So I go in the laundry, and I tell Otto Orenstein—he was an accountant for the telephone company. I took him, he was my assistant. He did all the work, and I didn't do nothing. And at that time, they had the women in the laundry to do the ironing, this and that. So I got the thing going, straighten up everything.

(Another one of my duties was bringing meals to the Japanese mini-submariner who was captured after the Pearl Harbor attack. He was kept in a special cage at Sand Island. I brought him food three times a day, and he was always very respectful to me, bowing and so forth. I noticed that on his arms there were marks where he had burned himself with a cigarette.)

Then one day, this Lieutenant Spillen comes over. "I hear you're bringing food from here to the [women]."

See, where the men was there was a chain link fence and a gate. And I used to go through the gate, and I used to put the big pot on either side and go through the gate. And when the guy would come over to frisk me, I said, "Get out, you son of a bitch. I want to bring something for the women."

So he tells me, "You bringing in food for the women."

"Sure, sure I do. And you better keep quiet." I'm telling you.

Then one day, this little bastard—you know, because he was no good, Lieutenant Spillen, a little two-by-four. He was a ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at the University [of Hawai'i], then the war came along, they made him lieutenant. So when we open up the kitchen in the morning, the first thing we did was to make coffee, toast, and sandwiches. Well, these poor GIs—among those GIs was the mayor's son. He was outside, cold. And naturally, you smell coffee, that's what they want, a cup of coffee. First coffee come out, I get a cup, I get a sandwich, and I used to bring it to him. So, he'll be drinking his coffee, and this Spillen caught him. Somebody told him that I used to give the guards. He comes over. (JP makes grumbling noise.) I says, "Hey, you stay here. I don't have to stay here. You refuse 'em. I cannot refuse 'em. They want coffee, by God, I'll give it to them, whether you like it or not." And that's why they didn't like me, because I used to tell 'em off.

They used to bring in quartered beef. I had all the German cooks from the Royal Hawaiian [Hotel] and from the Moana [Hotel], all the best cooks. We used to carve all the best parts, and that was for us. And the scraps we used to give it to the Japanese.

JR: How did you—it seemed like you got along pretty well with the other people you were interned with.

JP: Oh yeah, everybody. Only one man---I cannot think of his name now, and I knew him well. And we were talking one day, and I said, "Look, everything was coming along nice until the bastards came along and spoiled (everything)." He had a Japanese wife, and now the son of a bitch want to hit me because I talk like that about the Japanese. But if you was in my place, you'd be the same. They take you away from your home, from your family, on account of them.

It used to be a lot of fun. And I used to hide the toilet paper. Anybody who wants toilet paper had to give me cigarettes.

(Laughter)

JP: Everybody want to take a sunbath, so I says, "I got some cream coming over, and you guys save the cigarettes." I got the Crisco and put some vanilla extract and mixed it.

(Laughter)

JP: I mean, we used to laugh like hell. You know, Preis, the architect, [Alfred] Preis? And Otto Orenstein? Did you talk to them?

JR: I met Preis, yeah.

JP: You met Preis?

JR: Yeah, not Orenstein.

JP: Now, Preis is supposed to be the high-class guy, you know. He used to show 'em the exercise [i.e., calisthenics]. And his wife was in the laundry, too. We had lunch together about a couple of months ago, with Preis.

JR: So there was contact between the men and women?

JP: No, no.

JR: Just in the laundry.

JP: They were separated, yeah. Because I was in the laundry, and they had to work in the laundry. And I used to bring 'em special food, you know. The German cooks used to cook it. I'd take two pots, put 'em under my shirt. And was a (fellow by the name of) Goldberg (guarding the gate). Most of the time he was on duty, a little Jew boy. And I said, "Hey, get the hell away, because I got something."

Then in the laundry, we had a German fellow. I can't remember his name now. He was in a German submarine in the First World War. (He was an engineer. Before being interned, the military hired him to put up the posts for the fence that surrounded our Sand Island quarters. He was ridiculed by us for doing that, for locking us up.) (But when he was finished putting up the posts), then he got picked up, you know, interned with us. And he was in charge of the boiler in the laundry. We had a oil-burning boiler to make the hot water. And he used to

that medicine for his heart all the time.

So one day, the big ship came along there, huge ship (with four smokestacks). Where we were we could see, because Sand Island, you know. So right away, they come to me.

"What's it going to be? What's it going to be?"

"You know what's going to be? They're going to take sixteen of us and they're going to shoot us."

"Who?"

I says, "I don't know who, but sixteen of us going to be shot. (Chuckles) And the other has to be taken away (on the ship)."

(Laughter)

JP: Now, they all—the guy who had the heart trouble, I thought he was going to die. In other words, just like kids, you know. We had nothing else to do, nothing to worry about.

JR: How many of the Europeans were there do you think?

JP: Oh, I could not tell you exactly.

JR: Take a guess. Was it fifty?

JP: Maybe a little more than fifty. Because they had all these Germans from the hotels, and they had from outside. About fifty, sixty. [By the end of the day on December 8, 1941, ninety-eight people of German descent and fourteen people of Italian descent were in custody on O'ahu.]

JR: It sounds like there was a lot of joking around.

JP: Oh yeah.

JR: I mean, were you angry too though?

JP: No. Who you going to get angry with? Tell me, with who? The fellows in there, they are in the same boat as you. So you going to get angry with them? Some of those guys, they thought maybe they were too good or what. You don't bother with them, you stay away from them. Like that Spillen, his uncle—his father's brother was interned. And we were sitting in the sun. That Spillen used to walk in the back, (JP makes grumbling noise) just like that. Was a small guy, short legs, you know. He shake when he walk. So his uncle call him, "Why don't you get me a pipe or tobacco?"

"You lucky we don't shoot you," he tells his own uncle. The son of a bitch. Since that day, nobody had any use for him. But otherwise, yeah, we got along nice. We used to play cards, joke. Then was getting kind of cold, so we take a blanket—we had Joe Entrella, he was a tailor. He used to take a blanket and make coats out of it. Not for everybody, you know, just

his friends. I got one coat. Then when I came out, I give it to somebody. And they couldn't get no onions, so (after I was released) I took a whole bag full of onion and I sent it to them.

JR: So you were the first one to go?

JP: Yeah, first one to come out.

JR: What happened to your home and your business when you were interned?

JP: Well, the business, the guy that was in charge stole everything. The home was here. They could not touch it. As a matter of fact, the guy that was in charge of the store, when he saw that I was locked up like that, he went to Mr. [William] Borthwick at the tax office. He says, "I'll pay his taxes for him." Mr. Borthwick, he was the [territorial] tax commissioner. He told Mr. Borthwick that they were shipping me back to Italy. Mr. Borthwick told him, "If he cannot pay the taxes, I'll pay it for him." Then, all right, he tried to steal the store. When I come out, got started again, he was out. He died. He killed himself up in Wahiawā. He went down to nothing, broke. Those guys that make money, that try to make money like that, they don't get it. Somebody up there watches all those things. I mean it. I believe in that.

JR: It catches up with them.

JP: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

JR: So you got your store back in order.

JP: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JR: But then you moved to the Mainland.

JP: Well, when I went to the Mainland, it was after I got everything going again. Those guys, I tell you, they try to make it the easy way by stealing, by crooked. No, if I got something, I want to know it's mine. I worked for it. You understand? Nobody gave me nothing, and I don't want nothing. I'm a typical Italian. I don't want no nothing. He was Puerto Rican. So when he was down and out—my wife could tell you—I says, "I got a lot of machines." See, I used to buy a lot of surplus from the army. I says, "I'll give you a set. Find a place, I'll give you a set of machines, so you get started for yourself and make a living, make some money." Another person wouldn't give him nothing. But with me, no, I can't hold a grudge. I feel sorry. A person like that I feel sorry for, you know, because if they had any brains they wouldn't do that. Because you must have realized that you got to get things honestly, not (as a) beggar or a damn crook.

JR: You know, a number of the people that were interned tried to file a lawsuit after the war for being interned. Do you know anything about that?

JP: Well, that (didn't) do them any good. They asked me. I said, "The government, if that's what they want to do, that's what they'll do." There's only one thing that's bad. You see they pay the Japanese, but not the Germans or Italians or other. They don't get nothing. But you know why? The Japanese had [Spark] Matsunaga and Inouye, the senators. But we got no Italian

senators. We got [Alfonse] d'Amato, we got the others. They're a bunch of dumb fools, you know. They think for themselves, they don't think about others. So in other words, we have nobody in Washington to do something to get money for us.

Like Otto [Orenstein], when we had this [fiftieth anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack], he was on television, "Yeah, but we didn't get no [\$]20,000."

I says, "Listen to me, you're lucky they let you stay."

Well, I guess that's enough for today.

JR: Yeah.

JP: Yeah.

JR: Thank you very much.

JP: That's quite all right.

END OF INTERVIEW

AN ERA OF CHANGE

Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i

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Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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